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## Notes and Opinions.

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**The Report of the International Lesson Committee.** — The *Sunday School Times* for May 13, 1899, prints in full the report of the International Lesson Committee presented at the convention at Atlanta. After mentioning the fact, already published, that the lessons for the next six years will be divided, giving two and a half years to the Old Testament and three and a half to the New, the report proceeds to discuss various schemes which have been proposed for something like graded lessons, that is, special lessons for children. A subcommittee was appointed to obtain suggestions upon this line, and "secured a number of lesson outlines, some for one, others for two or more years. They represented a variety of methods, each having earnest advocates. These outlines illustrated widely different methods of teaching—"from those of the kindergarten, illustrating the presence and power of God in nature, and hardly requiring any selections from the Bible, to profound theological catechisms based on proof-texts. Some writers were confident that Bible study should begin with Old Testament stories, on the ground that the divine method of developing the mind of the child is the same as that of developing the human race. Others insisted that the life and teachings of Christ should first be presented to the child as the perfect revelation of God, and that these should later be supplemented by Old Testament history and prophecy and New Testament ethics." After extended investigation the committee decided that "it could not at present unite on any separate plan of lessons for primary classes which would be generally acceptable in connection with the International Lesson system," thinking that "it would not be difficult to organize many schools, competent teachers being provided and permanent attendance assured, which could use to highest advantage a graded system of topics and texts, comprising several separate courses. Under the present and apparently necessary organization of Sunday schools throughout the world the committee is not able to prepare such a graded system, and to put it forth with confidence in its adaptability and success."

On the whole, therefore, the committee decided that it must legislate for the great mass of teachers "to whom the simple message of

the gospel and the plain counsels of the Word of God for guidance in daily life are most welcome."

In the light of this general principle the committee determined to give special prominence to the biographical element, and to "select concrete portions of the Bible as centers, with which may be connected by lesson writers and teachers more or less of the related parts of the same subject, according to the capacity of the pupils. The verses selected to be printed must necessarily be few, and the passage brief. The urgent and practically unanimous desire of publishers of lesson helps is that the reading lesson shall not usually exceed a dozen verses."

The report then goes on to discuss various matters in detail, especially giving attention to various criticisms which have been made upon its work.

On the whole, the report of the committee furnishes grounds for hope that among the better class of Sunday-school workers there is beginning to be felt the need of a less mechanical arrangement of study. It is easy to see the difficulties under which the international organization works. We should be the last to deny it credit for the service which it has really rendered, but this report makes it evident that, in the future as in the past, its chief work is to be devoted, not to the aid of those schools which are able to care for themselves and which are possessed of high-grade teachers, but to schools of a less satisfactory sort. In the meantime, what is to be done for the Sunday schools which believe that the best education in religion cannot be gained by following such courses of lessons as are prepared for the less intelligent schools? And what shall be done for schools which believe that a graded curriculum means something more than different ways of teaching the same lesson—that general pedagogical principles should be applied to Sunday schools as well as to public schools? And what shall be done in the selection of lessons and the preparation of helps for these schools? To all of these questions the report of the international committee gives little answer, except to emphasize the difficulty of choosing any supplemental or graded lessons which shall be approved by all schools. Its express waiving of any authority in the matter and statement "that any scheme of Bible study which we may hope will prevail must commend itself by its own merit and fitness for its purpose," makes it evident that the international Sunday-school convention does not plan to go far toward meeting a demand of the most intelligent Sunday-school teachers. But if not the international convention, who shall provide proper material for proper study of the Bible? And how

long are the “publishers of lessons helps” to control the international committee, and through them the number of verses and, consequently, the general character of instruction ?

If, as this report expressly states, the expenses of the committee “have been assessed by the treasurer of the association on publishers of lesson helps,” is it not time for the inauguration of a movement free from such dependence and consequent dictation ?